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Meeting of the parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment
in a Transboundary Context
Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment
(Third meeting, 9- 12 October 2000)
(Item 2, (d) of the provisional agenda)

Sofia Ministerial Declaration */
Submitted by the Bureau

We, the Ministers of the Environment and the European Community Commissioner for the Environment, gathered in Sofia, Bulgaria from 24 to 27 February 2001 on the occasion of the second meeting of the Parties of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context

1. Celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Espoo Convention.
2. Honour the efforts of all countries and stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Convention.
3. Note with great satisfaction that the Convention was the first significant international legally binding instrument that was dedicated to environmental impact assessment.

*/ This document has not been formally edited.

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4. Recognise with appreciation the significant achievements of the Convention. Its considerable impact on international environmental law and its promotion of environmental impact assessment within the region of the UNECE and at the global level have led to:

- (a) Greatly enhanced international cooperation that has prevented and mitigated adverse environmental impacts at both transboundary and national levels;
- (b) The promotion of environmental impact assessment as an effective international instrument for environmental protection;
- (c) The widespread introduction of the requirement that there should be full consideration of environmental factors at an early stage in decision-making processes relating to particular projects;
- (d) Increased involvement of the public in such decision-making processes;
- (e) The introduction of effective laws, at the level of the UNECE Member States and the European Community, implementing the requirements of the Convention;
- (f) The recognition by the international community of the importance of environmental impact assessment, as witnessed by principle 17 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted in 1992, the year following the adoption of the Convention;
- (g) Its international recognition at a global level, *inter alia* by the International Law Commission, as a pioneering Convention enshrining the principles of environmental impact assessment;
- (h) Its use as a precedent for the text of other environmental instruments, both at the regional and the global level;

5. Underline the major role the Convention has played in promoting the core principles of environmental protection, including the precautionary principle, the polluter pays principle as well as the integration of environmental concerns in decision-making and the principle that preventive measures should be taken.

6. Applaud the contribution the Convention has made in promoting public participation pursuant to principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and the principle of sustainable development.

7. Invite civil society and all stakeholders to contribute further to the development of the convention, in particular by taking full advantage of the provisions in the Conventions Rules of Procedure that provide for national and international non-governmental bodies and agencies qualified in fields relating to environmental impact assessment to participate in Meetings of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies.

8. Call upon the international financing institutions, such as the EIB, EBRD and the World Bank, to fully apply environmental impact assessment to investment projects with national or transboundary impacts, according to the provisions of the Espoo Convention.
9. Urge the Parties to hold national coordination meetings between national focal points of the UNECE Conventions to discuss
10. Encourage the continuing process promoting the exchange of information between the various bodies of the different Conventions adopted under the aegis of the UNECE.
11. Are aware of the increasing interest in the Convention in the international Community.
12. Encourage states that are entitled to become Parties to the Convention, but that have not yet done so, to take all appropriate steps to conclude the Convention and to become part of the Espoo family of nations.
13. Welcome enhanced cooperation with states outside the UNECE region in an effort to extend the area of application of the principles of the Convention beyond the region.
14. Emphasise that in order to reap the full benefit of the Convention, the Parties must not only conclude the instrument, but also introduce all the necessary national measures, both practical and legal, fully to implement their obligations.
15. Acclaim the establishment of a mechanism to promote compliance with the Convention, and trust that all Parties, especially those that are having difficulties implementing their obligations under the Convention, will welcome the efforts of the new Implementation Committee to support states in their efforts to achieve full compliance.
16. Congratulate the Parties with their decision to adopt a legally binding Protocol to the Convention on Strategic Environmental Assessment, and urge that the Protocol should:
 - a) Take due account of the outcome of the London Conference on Environment and Health as well as the Vienna Declaration adopted at the Regional Conference on Transport and the Environment;
 - b) Be applicable in a national and transboundary context;
 - c) Fully reflect the principles of the 1998 Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters;
 - d) Integrate environmental and health concerns in strategic decisions of certain economic sectors, such as transport, energy and agriculture;

- e) Supplement existing environmental impact assessment regulations with provisions on strategic environmental assessment;
- f) Make reference to the similarity of environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment methodology.